

SICK AND DISABLED SEAMEN.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 631.]

JANUARY 23, 1847.

Read, and referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs.

REPORT.

Mr. Seaman, on leave to introduce a bill "for the benefit of sick and disabled seamen," presents to the House the following communication from Dr. Ruschenberger, the surgeon of the United States naval hospital at New York, as his report upon the subject of said bill :

UNITED STATES NAVAL HOSPITAL,
New York, January 4, 1847.

DEAR SIR : A few days since, when I had the pleasure to see you, I suggested that the expenses of the *marine* hospital fund might be decreased, so that its receipts might equal the demands against it ; and also that the revenue of the *navy* hospital fund might be increased.

A brief history of these funds may assist us in understanding the subject.

On the ground that seafaring people are improvident, and frequently require to be taken care of, both at home and in foreign countries, when sick or wounded, it was deemed expedient to deduct a portion of their earnings when well, to provide for them suitable accommodations in time of need. No portion of the revenue of the general government was appropriated for charitable or eleemosynary purposes, as is the case necessarily by State or municipal governments ; and it often happens that the sailor needs charity when in a municipality where he cannot claim it. All of us are citizens of some particular State, besides being citizens of the United States ; and from continuously inhabiting the same locality, may, in case of need, claim the benefits of local charitable institutions. But sailors are emphatically citizens of the United States, and, from their wandering habits, rarely have claims on local institutions for the relief of the sick and disabled. The labors of seamen contribute more largely and more directly to the benefit of the general government than to that of any municipal or State government. It seems, therefore, proper that the needy and afflicted in this class of our fellow-citizens should be provided for by the general government ; but, instead of doing so, it enacted laws to compel the class of seafaring men to provide for its own poor

By an act approved July 16th, 1798, a tax of twenty cents monthly was levied on the pay or wages of all seafaring people ; and, in consideration of the payment of this tax, collectors of ports are directed in the same act to "provide for the temporary relief and maintenance of sick or disabled

seamen in hospitals." Under this law all seafaring people who pay this tax, or "hospital money," are entitled to the "relief" specified or intended.

"Temporary relief and maintenance" does not refer to any definite period of time; but, it is presumed, has reference to curable cases, so that the incurable or permanently disabled have no right, under the law, to relief or maintenance.

The rate of the tax thus levied is very heavy, as may be seen by comparing it with the amount of seamen's resources. For example, in the navy the total pay and emolument of a seaman are, annually—pay \$144, and rations \$73; equal to \$217. From this sum he pays yearly \$2 40, or more than one per cent. (1.10) on his total income. This is not an income tax, nor a property tax, but a tax upon the liability to misfortune of a class whose pursuit is eminently perilous to health and life.

An act approved March 2d, 1799, levied the same amount of tax (to be applied in the same way) on persons serving in the navy. Officers, seamen, and marines under this act were entitled to the same advantages as sailors in the merchant service.

The fund resulting under the operation of these two acts constituted the "*marine hospital fund*."

By an act approved February 26th, 1811, the moneys, or tax collected from persons serving in the navy, were separated from the marine hospital fund, and constituted a fund under the title of "navy hospital fund," as no person in the navy had derived any advantage from the marine hospital fund between the years 1799 and 1811; and as it was fairly shown that the navy had paid at least \$50,000 into it, this sum was taken from the marine hospital fund and paid over as the foundation of the navy hospital fund. By the act of 1811 the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Treasury, were constituted commissioners of this fund; but, by an act approved July 10th, 1832, the Secretary of the Navy became the sole commissioner.

The act of 1811 provides not only for the temporary, but also for the permanent relief of sick and disabled officers, seamen, and marines; and under its authority the naval asylum at Philadelphia was erected.

The present sources of revenue to the navy hospital fund are, twenty cents monthly deducted from the pay of every person serving in the navy, and twenty cents (the value of a ration) daily from the pay or emolument of every person sick, and maintained at the cost of the navy hospital fund. The twenty cents monthly in 1844, when the number of persons serving in the navy was 1,420 officers, 7,500 men, and 1,000 marines, produced annually about \$24,000; and about \$10,000 more accrue on account of the stopped rations of the sick.

No appropriations are made by Congress for the support of the sick in hospitals, the expenses of which are entirely defrayed by the navy hospital fund. The naval appropriations for medicines, &c., annually made, are expended on the sick afloat.

On the 1st March, 1843, the navy hospital fund amounted to \$248,978 26; but since then it has decreased, and now does not probably exceed \$180,000.

The fund has never been invested, because the commissioner has no authority in law to invest it. The Hon. John Y. Mason, in his annual report of November 25th, 1844, suggested that the fund should be invested in securities of the United States. It has been calculated that the loss in inter-

est in thirteen years, up to 1842, is \$79,980 99, or an annual average loss of \$6,152 38.

Now, I suggest that another source of income to the fund be added, and that the commissioner of it be authorized to invest the fund in securities of the United States. Let it be enacted that, at the expiration of one year after the death of any and all persons who have died, or who may hereafter die intestate while in the navy of the United States, all balances which shall be found due to said deceased persons, and unclaimed by their legal heirs, shall be placed to the credit of the navy hospital fund, by the proper officer of the Treasury Department; and the said moneys or balances shall be, and are hereby declared to be, the property of said navy hospital fund, and the commissioner of the navy hospital fund is hereby authorized and directed to invest the said fund in securities of the United States, and all moneys accruing to said fund in future, except so much thereof as may be required for the erection or necessary extension and repairs of hospital buildings and tenements, and the maintenance of naval asylums and hospitals for the use of the navy.

If the fund were invested, and the unclaimed balances of those who die in the service paid into the fund, the interest, with the amount accruing from rations stopped on account of the sick, would be sufficient to meet all demands for the support of asylums and hospitals for the navy.

The cost of maintaining sick in naval hospitals cannot be safely set down at less than thirty cents a head daily; therefore, as the stopped rations yield only twenty cents a head daily, ten cents must be drawn from the fund, so that it must gradually become less, until the time when Congress will be called on to appropriate money for the current expenses of hospital establishments.

From public documents I learn that the aggregate of hospital money collected from the merchant service for the year 1842 was \$72,429 32, and the expenditure for the same year was \$93,531 68; that the expense of sick and disabled seamen in the merchant service exceeded the receipts \$21,102 36 for the year 1842, and for the half year ending June, 1843, the expenditure exceeded the receipts \$9,129 77. Last year \$25,000 were appropriated by Congress to meet the deficit of the marine hospital fund; and unless some means be devised to prevent this annual deficit, it will probably increase from year to year.

I know of no means of increasing the income of the marine hospital fund. But I believe its expenditures can be reduced without curtailing in the least degree the comfort and accommodation of those requiring relief.

I believe that marine hospitals are now organized at Mobile, Key West, Norfolk, Virginia, Chelsea, Massachusetts; and others are authorized by law and in course of construction at New Orleans, Ocracoke, North Carolina, Louisville, Pittsburg, and Cleveland. At Charleston, South Carolina, seamen, when sick, are taken care of in the public hospital, and paid for from the marine hospital fund, at the rate of sixty cents a day. At Philadelphia and at New York the charge in the city hospitals is \$3 a week per head. In a word, the least average cost of maintaining sick seamen in the several collecting districts, taken together, is \$3 a week.

At the naval hospital, New York, the daily average number of sick from the navy for the year ending June 30, 1845, was 80, and the largest number at one time was 117. The daily average cost per man for food, medicines, hospital stores, groceries, &c., was sixteen and a half cents; and,

including fuel, lights, wages of attendants, &c., I am satisfied the whole daily average cost per man does not exceed thirty cents, or \$2 10 a week.

If the sick of the commercial marine could be supported at the same rate, the demand on the marine hospital fund would be reduced one-third. In other words, \$50,000 would take care of as many sick seamen as \$75,000 do under existing arrangements.

By reference to published reports, I estimate that the average number of sick from the merchant service in the city hospital, New York, is 100, and in the Pennsylvania hospital, Philadelphia, 15. Although not absolutely accurate, this estimate is sufficiently near the truth for our present object.

The naval hospital building at New York, as it now stands, will easily accommodate 185 beds, besides the requisite number of attendants; and by erecting quarters for the accommodation of the medical officers, 200 can be readily accommodated, and, if necessity required, 250 could be comfortably lodged.

The arrangements of the building are such that it costs no more for fuel with 200 patients than it does for 50. With 50 patients we require an apothecary, a steward, a matron, 2 cooks, 2 washers, and 5 nurses, whose salaries are estimated in the above statement. This number of attendants was found sufficient for 100 patients; and if the number were increased to 200, it would be necessary to add 5 or 6 additional attendants, at a cost of \$120 a year each; consequently, the daily average cost per patient must decrease in proportion as the number increases.

As there is ample hospital accommodation at any rate, by making only additional quarters for medical officers on the grounds, for the navy at New York, so long as the navy is limited to 10,000 men, and also for all the sick of the merchant service, let the latter be admitted into the naval hospital at a charge of twenty-five cents daily, or \$1 75 a week, instead of the \$3 now paid at the city hospital. This would at once save to the marine hospital fund \$125 a week, or \$6,500 a year, supposing the average number to be 100. Let it be enacted that, in those collection districts where naval hospitals exist, surgeons in charge of naval hospitals shall receive and provide the necessary comforts and medicines for all seafaring people who may present a ticket of admission signed by the collector of the port, and it shall be the duty of the surgeon in charge of said hospital, on the last day of each month, to forward to the chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery a statement of the names of patients received, and the number of days each one has been subsisted in the hospital, together with the tickets of admission, in order that the chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery may receive at the rate of twenty-five cents daily for each and every man in the hospital, from the marine hospital fund, and credit the same to the navy hospital fund. Suppose, for example, the average number, in a month of 30 days, be 100, the navy hospital fund would be entitled to receive from the marine hospital fund 3,000 rations, at twenty-five cents each—equal to \$750 the month, or about \$9,000 for the year. The expenses of the hospital would be borne by the navy hospital fund, and the disbursements made, as at present, under the direction of the chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in the Navy Department.

The admission of sick merchant seamen into naval hospitals could not interfere with their discipline or regulation, because the same power which controls merchant seamen in civil institutions would make them subordinate in naval hospitals.

This plan would increase the labor and responsibility of the surgeon in charge of the hospital, as well as the cares of his assistants; but it would proportionately increase their experience and knowledge of the diseases of seamen, and, consequently, render them more valuable as medical officers.

Another means of reducing the expenditure of the marine hospital fund may be adopted.

There are 10 marine hospitals in the United States already built or being built. At each of these the physician in charge will receive annually \$1,000, or for the whole \$10,000 a year will be drawn from the marine hospital fund. Instead of employing civil practitioners in these institutions, place them in charge of surgeons in the navy, and thus save \$10,000 a year to the fund. Without adding to the number of surgeons at present on the list, there are enough "waiting orders," or "on leave of absence," who would be glad of the employment. The difference of pay between "waiting orders" and "on duty" would average \$350, or \$3,500 yearly for the whole 10; an amount which Congress ought cheerfully to contribute to assist men who are so heavily taxed to take care of the sick of their own vocation as our sailors are. If the whole plan be carried into execution, there will be no yearly deficit of \$25,000 for Congress to make up. Would it not be better to vote the \$3,500 than \$25,000 a year? which will probably be the case until some change be made in the present system of affording relief to sick and disabled seamen in the commercial marine.

Surgeons in the navy, from the rigid examinations to which they are subjected before receiving their commissions, and their experience among seamen subsequently, are eminently qualified for treating the diseases and injuries of seafaring men. They have thus a guarantee of qualification for the trust proposed to be given to them that civil practitioners, generally speaking, cannot produce. Besides, \$1,000 a year is not enough to command men of the qualifications—educational, professional, and moral—required in the surgeon and superintendent of an hospital.

All the marine hospital establishments might be safely confided to the direction of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in the Navy Department, where all matters connected directly or indirectly with nautical medicine should be managed. The Treasury Department is already overcharged with various duties, and I conceive it would be some relief to it to transfer all things belonging to the management of the marine hospital fund to the Bureau of Medicine, the duties of which are comparatively light. I think it will not be denied that medical affairs may be best managed by medical men, who have spent their whole leisure in qualifying themselves for this object.

The above hastily written suggestions are submitted, in a faint hope they may lead to something beneficial to the condition of seamen.

Of all classes of our fellow-citizens there is perhaps no one which requires more sympathy, more individual attention from the government, than the class of sailors. They live hard, and die early; they receive less for their labor, and are more heavily taxed, than any other men in society. The sea seems to be the last refuge of the unfortunate, the poor, the ignorant, the thoughtless; for, few of understanding and firmness of purpose will prefer the perils of shipwreck—a life hard spent in watching night and day, with often scanty or unpalatable food and drink, exposed to sunshine and rain, and storms and fatigue—to less hazardous and more profitable labor on land. As intelligence increases, the number of seamen will decrease, unless the advantages of a seafaring life are augmented. Commerce demands a full sup-

ply of sailors, on which it depends, in a degree, for its existence; and also a navy, for the protection of our interests on the coasts and on the high seas, the power of which depends on the strong arms and stout hearts of our seamen.

Can nothing be done to increase the numbers of this class of our citizens, and render the vocation of a sailor less uncertain of the means of comfort in sickness, in decrepitude, or in old age? Law and regulations have given to those who serve faithfully in the navy for twenty years a right to the benefits of the naval asylum. Why should there not be an asylum, also, for the merchant sailor, who has paid hospital money twenty years to the marine hospital fund? Under existing laws the merchant sailor is entitled only to "temporary relief and maintenance," which, under the construction given to the law, is limited to a period not exceeding four months. If not cured of any disease or injury in that time, poor Jack is sent to the alms-house or turned into the street to beg. No matter if consumption of the lungs be slowly but certainly conducting him to the grave, or, from other malady, only a few weeks of life yet remain to him—still, he must not be cared for beyond four months.

The interest I think you feel in this subject, I trust, will be my apology for this long communication.

I am, very respectfully and truly, your obedient servant,

W. S. W. RUSCHENBERGER.

HON. HENRY J. SEAMAN, M. C.

UN-SOLD PUBLIC LANDS NEAR THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

LETTER

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

A report from the Commissioner of the General Land Office, under date of the 28th instant, in compliance with a resolution adopted by the House of Representatives on the 11th instant, in the following words, viz: "Resolved: That the Secretary of the Treasury communicate to this House, as soon as may be, the quantity of unsold public lands within thirty miles of the Mississippi river, on each side thereof, from the southern extremity of the Lower rapids, near the mouth of the Des Moines river, to the mouth of the St. Lawrence; how long said lands have been so marked, together with the annual and average amount of the net proceeds of the same for the last five years."

PANAMA, I. 1895.

Dear Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 11th instant.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, January 11, 1895.

Sir: I have the honor, herewith, to transmit a report from the Acting Commissioner of the General Land Office, under date of the 28th instant, in compliance with a resolution adopted by the House of Representatives on the 11th instant, in the following words, viz: "Resolved: That the Secretary of the Treasury communicate to this House, as soon as may be, the quantity of unsold public lands within thirty miles of the Mississippi river, on each side thereof, from the southern extremity of the Lower rapids, near the mouth of the Des Moines river, to the mouth of the St. Lawrence; how long said lands have been so marked, together with the annual and average amount of the net proceeds of the same for the last five years."

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
R. J. WALLACE,
Secretary of the Treasury.

Hon. JOHN W. GARN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

General Land Office, January 17, 1895.

Sir: In compliance with your instructions of the 28th instant, received on the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 11th instant, I have the honor to state that "within thirty miles of the Mississippi river, on each side thereof, from the southern extremity of the Lower rapids, near the mouth of the Des Moines river, to the mouth of the St. Lawrence, the quantity of unsold public land is estimated to be 11,004,106 acres."

